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20 May 1964

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Rostow-Lansburgh Meeting -- 21 May 1964

Participants: Mr. Walt Rostow, Chairman; Neary,  
McGeorge Bundy, Goddard, Green,  
Belna, Sullivan, Vogt, [redacted]

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1. The topic of discussion was the Sigma I-II Pentagon war game on Vietnam: specifically, whether Communist and world reactions would in fact be similar to those developed in the war game, and whether there are feasible ways and means open to the US to insure a less sombre outcome.

2. Mr. Rostow felt that the US could expect more world support than indicated in the war game. He based his judgment on two major theses: (a) that the US starts with a basic asset in that many of the world's country's are tied to our success or failure; and (b) that most of the world's states would stand back, somewhat permissively, and would not take an active political role unless they thought that US actions against the DRV were leading to major hostilities. No one voiced strong support of these theses. Mr. Bundy said that he thought the war game's assessment of world opinion was just about correct, because "most people just don't want an escalation started by us, and its risks, on the issues of S/K or Laos."

3. There was general agreement that much needed doing in defining US objectives in Vietnam and Laos more precisely, and that if this were done it would probably aid the US effort to sell a case of going against the North.

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4. There was some discussion of a Geneva conference, the only significant remark one by Mr. Bundy that to be engaged in hostilities against the DRV and to refuse to go to a conference would be an intolerable position for the US.

5. There were differences of view concerning VC ability to continue intervention without the DRV input, Mr. Poston tending to the view that they couldn't and Mr. Helms to the view that they could.

6. There was general agreement that the Chinese Communists would probably not react in extreme fashion, at least initially, to a US course against the DRV.

7. Later, at lunch, Mr. Bundy raised the question of whether the US should try to put the broken Souvanna Phouma back on his wall, or whether he and the present experiment are so shattered that the US should start thinking about other solutions in Laos. [redacted]

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[initials] 8. There was also general agreement, at lunch, on the extremely fragile political base in South Vietnam, the only differences around the table being shadings of opinion as to how much time the DRV and the US have -- under present conditions. Mr. Helms urged upon Boston, Bundy, and Goodpaster the merits of improving those conditions through an ambitious program of US political and administrative advisors at the elbows of key DRV officials, in Saigon and in the provinces. Some discussion followed of various US individuals (Lonsdale, Phillips, etc.) of the quality and experience necessary to perform such duties.

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Chief, PI Staff  
OFFICE OF NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE

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Distribution:

- cc 1 - Mr. Elder for the DCI  
2 - Mr. Knobbe for the DDCI  
3 - Mr. Helms  
4 - Mr. Colby  
5 - Mr. Cooper  
6 - Mr. Kent

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